

REBELLION, PART 3

EXODUS 32:11-14

God just told Moses He was going to destroy the Israelites for their rebellion. Let's begin by reviewing Exodus 32:7-10.

Exodus 32:7–10 ⁷Then the LORD spoke to Moses, “Go down at once, for your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have corrupted [תָּחַת] *themselves*. ⁸“They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshiped it and have sacrificed to it and said, ‘This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!’” ⁹The LORD said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and behold, they are an obstinate people. ¹⁰“Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation.”

These four verses set the stage for the following dialogue between Moses and Yahweh. Two primary issues that arise here involve intercessory prayer and the fact God changed His mind about destroying the Israelites and starting over with Moses. I want to say right up front this pericope is very difficult to completely understand and therefore to properly exegete. On the one hand, God promised Abraham land, seed, and blessing and the stipulations of the Abrahamic Covenant were dependent on God alone to fulfill because He obligated Himself to do so. On the other hand, He said He was going to destroy the Israelites for their rebellion and start over with Moses. How can He do that and remain faithful to His promises to Abraham?

The word “corrupt,” תָּחַת, is a very strong word. It implies that something is so marred, ruined, and corrupted that it has become useless. This is the same

word used in Genesis 6:11 where it was revealed the earth had become corrupt in the sight of God. This refers to such a state that with the exception of eight people and a few creatures, the entire world was destroyed. In God's sight, this word is expressing the depth of the depravity in which the Israelites entered into and the extreme anger this engendered on the part of Yahweh.

God seemingly divorced Himself from the people by referring to them as Moses' people whom he, Moses, led out of Egypt. At that moment, God was saying to Moses, these people are no longer fit to be called My people. Yet, we know it was Yahweh who led them out with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with signs and wonders and miracles. It was Yahweh who led them with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. It was Yahweh who saved them from destruction at the hands of the Egyptian army by parting the sea and sustained them with manna in the wilderness.

Deuteronomy 26:8 ⁸and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with great terror and with signs and wonders;

Exodus 13:21 ²¹The LORD was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night.

Exodus 14:13 ¹³But Moses said to the people, "Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the LORD which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever.

Exodus 16:4 ⁴Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction.

This pericope seems to present a very intricate, spiritually deep, and historically relevant fleshing out of the relationship between Yahweh and Moses and between Yahweh and Israel. We cannot ignore the fact this rebellion did not take God by surprise; He knew it was going to happen and His plan took it into consideration. When the people affirmed their commitment to obey the commandments of God only a few days before, He knew they were going to fail almost immediately after.

Deuteronomy 5:28–29 ²⁸“The LORD heard the voice of your words when you spoke to me, and the LORD said to me, ‘I have heard the voice of the words of this people which they have spoken to you. They have done well in all that they have spoken. ²⁹‘Oh that they had such a heart in them, that they would fear Me and keep all My commandments always, that it may be well with them and with their sons forever!

We also have to understand that God’s ways are not our ways and He is beyond our understanding. We know about Him only that which He allows us to know through general and special revelation. It is impossible for human beings to have complete knowledge of God and His ways.

Isaiah 55:8–9 ⁸“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” declares the LORD. ⁹“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts.

Romans 11:33 ³³Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!

God did not tell Moses He had already destroyed the Israelites; He said He was going to destroy them. The verbs used in verse 10 are imperfect which means the action is incomplete whether that is in the past, present, or future.

They are also expressed as first person volitional wishes, requests, or commands. The same grammatical construction was used to say Yahweh would make a great nation from Moses and that hadn't started yet either. The only imperative here is the command to Moses to "let Me alone." Yahweh could have and perhaps would have destroyed Israel and started over, but the grammar suggests there is some latitude here for Yahweh to change His mind and restore Israel to fellowship. We have to be very careful here. We can't say God didn't mean it when He said He was going to destroy the Israelites because that would be calling Him a liar. In fact, the Bible revealed God would have destroyed them had not Moses interceded for them. Moses was obviously a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; therefore, destroying the people at that point and starting over with Moses would have preserved the integrity of the Abrahamic Covenant. There are problems with this, however, because God made promises to those three patriarchs that would have been completely compromised if Moses' line alone was preserved. God promised Jacob his descendants, plural, twelve sons and not just one, would realize the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 28:10-18). If God had wiped the Israelites at the time of the rebellion, only the line of Levi from which Moses descended would have been preserved to enjoy the fulfillment of the Covenant. This also would have negated the prophecies God gave Jacob's sons in Genesis 49. Of particular note, would have been the negation of the promise to the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10) from which the Savior came. Conversely, if Moses had accepted God's offer and exalted him-

self as patriarch rather than humbling himself as prophet and priest intercessor, would God still have wanted to make a great nation of him? God provided even further temptation for Moses to accept His offer because He promised to make of Him a nation mightier and greater than the nation He already created that was marked for destruction.

Deuteronomy 9:14¹⁴ 'Let Me alone, that I may destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven; and I will make of you a nation mightier and greater than they.'

The rabbis are in unanimous agreement the command to "Leave Me alone" was actually an invitation to intercede. "There is a strong feeling among Christian and Jewish scholars alike that by requesting to be left alone, God is in fact *encouraging* Moses to intercede. Beginning with the Targums, they all interpret the divine statement as a reference to intercessory prayer...." Rabbi Eleazar said, "When, however, [God] said, 'Let Me alone that I may destroy them', Moses said to himself: this depends upon me, and straightway he stood up and prayed vigorously and begged for mercy. It was like the case of a king who became angry with his son and began beating him severely. His friend was sitting before him but was afraid to say a word until the king said 'were it not for my friend here who is sitting before me I would kill you'. He said to himself, 'this depends on me', and immediately he stood up and rescued him...." Rabbi Ababahu said, "Were it not explicitly written, it would be impossible to say such a thing. This teaches that Moses took hold of the Holy One, blessed be He, like a

man who seizes his fellow man by his garment and said before Him: Sovereign of the Universe, I will not let go of You until you forgive and pardon them.”¹

Tiemeyer concluded, “To conclude, we have seen how Jewish and Christian traditional exegetes alike throughout much of pre-critical exegetical history understood foreknowledge as a tool to be used in order to influence God’s decisions. In addition, both groups showed the propensity to read intercession and/or repentance into certain texts where it was perceived to be lacking. This homogeneity testifies to the shared Judaeo-Christian [sic], not to say the universal, aspect of the underlying theological concern. The overarching picture of God as painted in the Bible, both the Hebrew Bible and the Old and the New Testaments, is that of a merciful God who would rather forgive than punish. Traditional scholars, attempting to create a coherent theology based on the entire biblical text, thus presuppose the divine attribute of mercy to be present even in those texts where it is not directly apparent. Accordingly, in *all* cases where God is portrayed as bringing about destruction, God’s mercy would have compelled him to provide foreknowledge of the destruction in order to enable his followers to respond to the divine decision and if possible, to cancel or modify it.”² Even though the text doesn’t explicitly say God was inviting Moses to intercede, the

¹ Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, “The Compassionate God of Traditional Jewish and Christian Exegesis,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 58, no. 2 (2007): 203-204.

² Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, “The Compassionate God of Traditional Jewish and Christian Exegesis,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 58, no. 2 (2007): 206.

predominate line of thought is when His attributes and promises are taken into consideration, it is the only conclusion that fits all the data.

Moses' actions on behalf of the Israelites would bear fruit by the time he finished his argument (Ex. 32:14).

Psalm 106:23 ²³Therefore He said that He would destroy them, Had not Moses His chosen [בְּחִיר, ἐκλεκτός (LXX)] one stood in the breach before Him, To turn away His wrath from destroying *them*.

Chosen, בְּחִיר, ἐκλεκτός (LXX), means that which is choice or excellent referring to someone or something that is the best of its kind or of top quality. The word is not simply about being chosen by God; it is about the choicest person being appointed to God's service. Moses is the choicest one among the Israelites who stands before Yahweh in ways no other man will ever be able to do. God has a purpose for those who are choice and they are commissioned for service to accomplish that purpose. That certainly applied to Moses. As a result, his position before Yahweh gave him a standing to come before Him in a very powerful, almost confrontational way in order to intercede for the Israelites in this situation.

At some level, the command, "Leave Me alone," may have been a figurative way for Yahweh to express His anger at the rebellion in the Israelite camp. We express feelings of anger that way. How often have people expressed disapproval over another person's actions by saying something like, "If you do that again, I'm going to kill you," or "I could just kill that kid when I get

my hands on him." These are expressions of extreme disapproval and a desire for changed behavior, but they are not necessarily homicidal threats.

The command to "leave Me alone," was possibly a rhetorical device to get Moses' attention and invite a dialogue between the two of them. Yahweh also seemed to be testing Moses. Was Moses going to be tempted to replace Abraham in the plan of God? Or was the man of God going to submit to his original call and to all God had revealed to him from the beginning when he was a fugitive fleeing from Pharaoh and shepherding sheep and goats in the desert? Was Moses committed to God's plan for Israel and the world as it had been expressed in the Abrahamic Covenant or was he willing to abandon that Covenant in order to magnify his own name? The Israelites were being unfaithful, but would Moses remain the faithful man of God he had, to this point, proven himself to be? Was Yahweh trying to entice Moses into stepping up and being the intercessor between Yahweh and the Israelites that a prophet and priest are supposed to be?

A major part of the interaction between Yahweh and Moses was designed to show Yahweh's extreme anger at what happened. It also provided the opportunity for Moses to step up and be that intercessor he had been appointed to be. Ultimately, Moses was going to display his loyalty to God and His plan as the prophet understood it from the start.

Moses rejected the offer to become the father of the nation in place of Abraham. Moses didn't have any desire to become the new patriarch of Israel;

instead, he stepped up and interceded for the Israelites. The Holy Spirit made it a point to add a note in the Pentateuch addressing the humility of Moses.

Numbers 12:3 ³(Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth.)

Moses' desire was for the people and the nation to live for God and prosper; his desire was not to personally advance at the expense of the people Yahweh just led out of slavery in Egypt.

Moses did, in fact, step up in intercessory prayer for his people and the nation they were beginning to become. Moses advocated for the Israelites in three ways. First, he reminded Yahweh that it was actually Yahweh, not Moses, who created Israel and led out of Egypt. Second, Moses spoke of the damage that would be done to Yahweh's reputation if He destroyed the people on whose behalf He just destroyed Egypt in order to rescue them. Third, He reminded God of the Abrahamic Covenant and the promises Yahweh made to Abraham, Isaac, and Israel.

Exodus 32:11 ¹¹Then Moses entreated [הִתְלַח] the LORD his God, and said, "O LORD, why does Your anger burn against Your people whom You have brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand?"

Rather than immediately going back down the mountain, Moses began interceding for the Israelites. Entreat, הִתְלַח, in this context means to appease, to entreat, to implore, and to appeal to. It is coupled with the word face, פָּנֶיךָ, which taken together carries the idea that Moses was attempting, at that moment, to soften or calm the angry countenance of Yahweh.

Immediately prior to this statement by Moses, God identified the people with Moses by saying it was Moses who led them out of Egypt. Moses turned that back around and said it was Yahweh who freed them and safely led them out of Egypt. The reality was the Israelites were identified with both Yahweh, who was obviously first in importance, and their prophet, Moses. The Israelites had so identified Moses with Yahweh's presence that when Moses was gone for so long on the mountain, they may have assumed God was gone as well and used the opportunity to revert to paganism. However, that's questionable because God's presence was visible to them. Some of them simply wanted to rebel and return to idolatry whether God was gone or not. Moses was God's representative leader of the people, but it was God who did the work to free them. Moses was the face of God to the people and an instrument for accomplishing God's purposes concerning them. God put Moses in the position of acknowledging God's role in freeing them from slavery. Moses couldn't free them; it took a supernatural power to free them. We know that throughout the remainder of the Pentateuch, Moses reminded the people it was Yahweh who led them out of Egypt. Other prophets in the Scriptures did the same thing. Whether or not the people really listened is another issue. We know Joshua reminded the Israelites who accompanied him into the land to "put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt ..." (Joshua 24:14).

Joshua was clearly speaking to the Israelites. Some commentators want to place the blame for the rebellion on the mixed multitude that left Egypt with the

Israelites (Ex. 12:38), but the Word of God places the blame for the rebellion squarely on the shoulders of the Israelites. We examined a number of Scriptures last week that said the Israelites forgot their Savior (Ps. 106:19-21) and rebelled. “This is your god, O Israel ...” as recorded here in Exodus 32:8 indicates it was the Israelites who were rebelling against their God. It is not appropriate for us to try and shift the blame for this rebellion from the Israelites to other people groups that happened to leave Egypt with them. When Moses recalled the rebellion in Deuteronomy 9, He clearly said it was the Israelites who had provoked God.

Deuteronomy 9:7 ⁷“Remember, do not forget how you provoked the LORD your God to wrath in the wilderness; from the day that you left the land of Egypt until you arrived at this place, you have been rebellious against the LORD.

The Israelites were the instigators of this rebellion, not the mixed multitude that left Egypt with them. They may have participated in it, but God totally blamed the Israelites for the idolatry.

Moses does not try to make excuses or shift the blame to the mixed multitude and away from the Israelites. He recognized the responsibility the people bore for abandoning the God who had just redeemed them out of slavery and freed them. Instead, Moses reminded Yahweh of His greatness and of His mercy for His people. Hamilton wrote, “At no point does Moses excuse the people for their sin. He never suggests that God is overreacting with ‘much ado about nothing.’ His appeal is entirely directed to God, and to his character, his reputation, and his past actions. Moses prays the way he prays not because of what he knows about his people, but he prays the way he does because of what he

knows about his God.”³ Cassuto understood Moses’ actions in a very similar way. “Moses does not attempt to justify the people. He realizes that they committed a great sin, and that strict justice requires them to be severely punished, but he appeals to the Divine attribute of mercy, and relies on the Lord’s paternal love for his people.”⁴

The second argument Moses made against the destruction of the Israelites involved God’s honor and reputation.

Exodus 32:12 ¹²“Why should the Egyptians speak, saying, ‘With evil [רַע] *intent* He brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth’? Turn [שׁוּב] from Your burning anger and change [נְהַם] Your mind about *doing* harm to Your people.

Moses was speaking with the God who, with a mighty hand, an outstretched arm, with great judgments, and with signs, wonders, and miracles, had just redeemed His people out of slavery in Egypt. He was the God who, through Moses, continually confronted Pharaoh, arguably the most powerful man on earth at the time, proclaiming, “Let My people go.” (Ex. 5:1). What kind of God would He be in the sight of the Egyptians if He killed all the Israelites in the wilderness after setting them free? After all, at least they were still alive while they were slaves in Egypt. Did He redeem them just to kill them off? God would have been defamed in the sight of the Egyptians if He destroyed them. That’s the argument Moses is making.

³ Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 538-539.

⁴ U Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. Israel Abraham (Jerusalem, The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1967), 415.

Evil, רָע, means bad, wicked, and no good. It pertains to that which is not morally pure or good according to a proper standard, implying this evil hinders or severs a relationship to a person or a principle which is itself proper. When the word is used as a noun as it is here, it refers to realities that are inherently evil, wicked, or bad, and to people of wickedness. In his defense before his brother, Aaron used this same word to claim Moses knew the Israelites were evil (Ex. 32:22). It should go without saying that evil is not one of the attributes of God; He cannot commit evil acts. Moses was telling God the Egyptians would think He was evil if He killed the Israelites which would be false, but it would defame Him not just in Egypt's eyes, but in the eyes of the world who knew what happened in Egypt.

Moses elaborated on this plea in Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy 9:26, 27-28 ²⁶"I prayed to the LORD and said, 'O Lord GOD, do not destroy Your people, even Your inheritance, whom You have redeemed through Your greatness, whom You have brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand.... ²⁸'Otherwise the land from which You brought us may say, "Because the LORD was not able to bring them into the land which He had promised them and because He hated them He has brought them out to slay them in the wilderness." ²⁹'Yet they are Your people, even Your inheritance, whom You have brought out by Your great power and Your outstretched arm.'

In addition to harming His reputation, Yahweh would be made to look powerless because the Egyptians would claim He was not able to take them into the land He promised them. His competence as the omnipotent God would be called into question if He destroyed the Israelites. God's love for Israel would

also be called into question. It would be thought that not only did He not love them, He hated them and freed them so He could kill them off in the wilderness.

Turn, שׁוּב, has a number of variations in terms of meaning. It means turn, change direction, to return, to repent, or to change one's mind. In this context, Moses is imploring Yahweh to turn away from His anger in order to change His mind about destroying the Israelites. The idea is that when one's anger is tempered or moderated, then the threat will not be carried out. We might say, "Cooler heads prevailed." This is the primary Hebrew word used to indicate man's repentance or change of mind. All our modern English versions translate this word as "turn" in this verse.

Change [your mind], נָחַם, means to be sorry, to comfort, and to console. It also means to repent or to change one's mind which is the context in this verse. By turning from His anger, Yahweh would have the opportunity to change His mind about destroying the Israelites. In the English translations, this is variously translated "change Your mind," "relent," and "repent." This word is the primary Hebrew word used to refer to God's change of mind.

The third argument Moses presented was to remind Yahweh of His promises to the patriarchs. In essence, Moses was asking Yahweh to remember His promises to the forefathers of the Israelites and keep those promises. Again, the attributes of God are on display. He cannot lie which implies He cannot break a promise.

Exodus 32:13 ¹³“Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants to whom You swore by Yourself, and said to them, ‘I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens, and all this land of which I have spoken I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit *it* forever.’”

Moses brought to mind the Abrahamic Covenant. God swore to this covenant by Himself, meaning He alone was responsible for seeing the Covenant to fulfillment. In Genesis 15:1-21 when the Abrahamic Covenant was ratified, Abram was asleep. God alone swore to the fulfillment of the Covenant stipulations. God specifically told Abraham He swore by Himself to fulfill the Covenant stipulations in recognition of Abraham's faithfulness concerning the command to sacrifice Isaac.

Genesis 22:15–18 ¹⁵Then the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, ¹⁶and said, “By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. ¹⁸“In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.”

Moses reminded Yahweh of those Covenant stipulations. First, He reminded Him He promised to multiply the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob “as the stars of the heavens” which is a figurative way of saying an uncountable number. Next, Moses reminded Yahweh He promised to bring those Israelites into a land that would be their own. Neither of those promises could be kept in the spirit in which they were originally made to the patriarchs if all the Israelites who came out of Egypt were killed. If the Israelites all died in the wilderness, then all the descendants of the patriarchs would not inherit the land. Only one small

line of their descendants would have numerous offspring to inherit the land. It would take hundreds of years to recreate the nation in the numbers that Yahweh proposed to kill in the wilderness. It took the twelve sons of Israel over four hundred years to build the population necessary for them to carry out God's will in subduing the land of Canaan. How much longer would it have taken to recreate that population from just one son? The iniquity of the Canaanites was fulfilled by that time (Gen. 15:16), and God's plan for history didn't need to hit the pause button for hundreds of more years while He rebuilt Israel from the line of Levi.

What did Moses do in this prayer? He stood on the Word of God. There seems to be a lesson in that for us today. If Moses can stand on the Word of God in a confrontational experience with God Himself, shouldn't we stand on the Word of God in any situation in which we might find ourselves in these dangerous times? Indeed, we should!

The end result is God changed His mind and spared the people which preserved the nation. That doesn't mean they didn't suffer temporal discipline for their rebellion, but the nation was spared.

Exodus 32:14 ¹⁴So the LORD changed [פָּקַד] His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people.

This Scripture, and others similar to it, has caused numerous theological problems because people claim God can change and this verse, they claim, is proof of the fact God changes. Therefore, Scripture that says God cannot

change is in error. One such verse is Malachi 3:6. The New Testament also confirmed that truth in Hebrews 13:8. Obviously, the doctrine that claims God changes is completely in error, not the Scriptures.

Malachi 3:6 ⁶“For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.

Hebrews 13:8 ⁸Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

The fact is God cannot change, but that doesn't mean He can't respond to man in different ways at different times in different dispensations and according to man's change of mind and behavior in time. What cannot change about God is His eternal attributes. God is who He is and He can be nothing else in any way. He is totally complete in and of Himself; He needs nothing and no one outside of Himself in order to be complete. The concept that He is complete in and of Himself is called aseity. He cannot change into someone else. To relate changing His mind in terms of how He deals with man in various times and places with changing His essential nature, that is, changing who He is as a Person, cannot be further from the truth.

One of the errors that has come out of this concept is called the openness of God. This is another nineteenth century heresy originally called process theology. A theologian named Clark Pinnock is probably the primary proponent of this doctrine today. These theologians deny the foreknowledge of God and the inerrancy of Scripture. They claim God's statement in Genesis 6:6 that He was “sorry that He had man on the earth” proves He doesn't know the future. Fur-

ther, the fact that He changes His mind about some things also proves He doesn't know the future. The core of this doctrine involves the debate between God's sovereignty and man's free will.

If God is sovereign and knows the end from the beginning, then why does He change His mind? Part of the answer goes back to the earlier point that we don't know everything there is to know about God and we don't know why He does some things at some times in the way He does them. It also has to do with how God's plan for history has the capacity to accommodate the free will decisions man makes and yet everything will work out in the end just as God has planned it to work out.

One author put it this way: "In spite of man's best effort, it is improbable that he'll ever be able to reconcile the issue of how exactly God relates to his creatures—of divine sovereignty and human freedom. He will have to be content responding, 'It's a mystery.' But this response is not an intellectual copout. In fact, it is a very fitting response, because it's biblical. According to Proverbs 25:2, "It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings." It is part of God's glorious nature to 'hide' certain things from us. If we knew everything, we'd be gods ourselves. As Bloesch rightly states, it would be too much for us: '...even in his revelation, God remains partially hidden (*Deus absconditus*). For God to cause his light to shine on us directly would be to overwhelm us. God reveals only what is adequate for our salvation and vocation as his ambassadors and heralds. God remains mystery even in his revelation

. . .’ The apostle Paul affirms this in Romans 11:33 when he declares, ‘Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!’⁵

Proverbs 25:2 ²It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, But the glory of kings is to search out a matter.

Romans 11:33 ³³Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!

Deuteronomy 29:29 ²⁹“The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.

We have all experienced God’s change of mind and how it works in the overall plan of God for history. If God never changed His mind about some things, no one could be saved. Everyone has a sin nature that flows from mankind’s rebellion against God in Adam, and everyone is under the condemnation of death because of it.

Romans 3:23 ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Romans 6:23 ²³For the wages of sin is death ...

John 3:18 ¹⁸“He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

God has determined that everyone, without exception, is condemned. In order for anyone to be saved, He has to change His mind concerning their eter-

⁵ Joao Mordoma, “Missiological Misgivings About ‘Openness of God’ Theology” in *Global Journal of Classical Theology* 3, no. 2 (November 2002).

nal status. He does that every time a person exercises their free will to believe in Christ Jesus as their Savior. The moment a person believes, God changes His mind about their eternal destiny and changes their position from eternally separated from Him to eternally present with Him in the family of God. That's all part of God's plan and it does not mean He fundamentally changes who He is in order to deal with mankind in time and space. It's His plan and He gets to make the rules.

An examination of the Scriptures reveals when God changes His mind about something, it is in connection with people, especially the nation of Israel, although Gentiles may experience His change of mind as well. Jonah discovered that truth in connection with the Assyrians. It may be that God regrets an action He has taken that does not turn out well due to the unfaithfulness of the man involved. Saul was an example.

1 Samuel 15:11, 23, 26-29¹¹“I regret [אָנַח] that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following Me and has not carried out My commands.” And Samuel was distressed and cried out to the LORD all night....²³“For rebellion is as the sin of divination, And insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He has also rejected you from *being* king.”...²⁶But Samuel said to Saul, “I will not return with you; for you have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel.”²⁷As Samuel turned to go, *Saul* seized the edge of his robe, and it tore.²⁸So Samuel said to him, “The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to your neighbor, who is better than you.”²⁹“Also the Glory of Israel will not lie or change [אָנַח, μετανοέω (LXX, repent)] His mind; for He is not a man that He should change [אָנַח, μετανοέω (LXX, repent)] His mind.”

The Hebrew word אָנַח is often translated “repent” in the Septuagint from the Greek μετανοέω.

In a situation similar to the one we have in Exodus, the prophet Amos interceded for Israel and God spared the Northern Kingdom from two calamities He had planned for them, but ultimately, He destroyed them because they continued to be unfaithful.

Amos 7:2–6 ²And it came about, when it had finished eating the vegetation of the land, that I said, “Lord GOD, please pardon! How can Jacob stand, For he is small?” ³The LORD changed [אָנָּן, μετανοέω (LXX, repent)] His mind about this. “It shall not be,” said the LORD. ⁴Thus the Lord GOD showed me, and behold, the Lord GOD was calling to contend *with them* by fire, and it consumed the great deep and began to consume the farm land. ⁵Then I said, “Lord GOD, please stop! How can Jacob stand, for he is small?” ⁶The LORD changed [אָנָּן, μετανοέω (LXX, repent)] His mind about this. “This too shall not be,” said the Lord GOD.

It is part of God's plan to interact with man in this way such that He changes His mind about judgment and justification. He may change His mind simply in response to human actions or He may change His mind out of compassion for people. Those who claim this makes God a changeable entity, are incorrect; God cannot change. In Exodus, God essentially invited Moses to intercede for the Israelites. God found the prophet's intercession acceptable and He changed His mind about destroying the people. When we consider God's character and attributes, His promises to the patriarchs, His work in redeeming the Israelites from slavery, and His plan for history concerning Israel, He could do nothing but change His mind and stay true to who He is. God changes His mind according to His sovereign purposes. Our understanding of His purposes is limited and finite contrasted with His knowledge which is complete; therefore, we have no standing to question either His actions or His motives.